Using algae to try and solve the plastic problem

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Imagine our world without plastics — they are everywhere, from construction and electronics to transportation and packaging. Overall strength and durability make plastic so useful, but they also make plastic a leading contributor to pollution.

According to a study by the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis at the University of California–Santa Barbara, as much as 13 million metric tons of plastic end up in oceans each year. This study also found that about one-half of the 300 million tons of plastic produced worldwide annually is used only once. To put these numbers into perspective, in 2014 the United States alone sold more than 100 billion plastic beverage bottles that account for 14 percent of America's pollution, despite recycling efforts.

Plastics can take up to 1,000 years to decompose in landfills and oceans. Thinner plastics, such as those used for water bottles, can take more than 450 years to degrade.

To address this problem, scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory have developed an alternative method to sustainably manufacture plastic that is not only durable but is easily biodegradable.

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